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ABSTRACT

Some researchers have suggested that there are developmental stages in adult life. If adult developmental stages exist, such stages would be reflected in one's career. Individuals would progress from their career dream when they first enter the work force through a period of stability, a mid-life transition period when they compare reality to their dream, and finally to a stage of accepting the reality of their career. If adult life stage theory is correct, the motivational styles of need for achievement, need for power, and need for affiliation should be sensitive indicators of changes in individuals as they progress through the career stages. To test this assuption, motivational style was measured by administering the Job Choice Decision-Making Exercise to 119 public school employees. Subjects also provided demographic data and rank ordered satisfying activities. A cluster analysis of results revealed three groups, each dominated by a different motivational style. No significant differences were found among the groups in terms of their ages, the number of years in their current occupation, or the number of dependent children. Multiple regressions revealed no significant relationships among these variables and motivational style. No differences were found among groups' ratings of activities which produced the most satisfaction. These results do not support the existence of discrete stages in adult life or career stages. (NRB)

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Motivational style and adult life stage theory

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Recent research in the area of adult development has sought to gain support for the hypothesis that there are developmental stages in adult life just as developmental stages have been proposed for childhood. If adult developmental stages exist, then an important area of life which would reflect such stages would be an individual's career.

What I would like to do today is to briefly explain general adult life and career stage theory, summarize the evidence for and against, point out some weaknesses in the current research, and describe our approach to the issue.

The following description of career stages represents a general paradigm of career development according to current life stage theory. The first developmental stage in a career occurs at the time one first enters the job market on a full time basis. At this time one is typically in the process of establishing independence from one's family. This is a necessary but often difficult period (Sheehy, 1976).

An important component involved in a person's career during this stage is The Dream. The Dream begins to evolve and provide goal-oriented behavior and motivation toward a specific life and career path (Hill and Miller, 1981; Dalton, 1977). This period of development ends with a review of one's status. Individuals may decide they are satisfied with their career and make a deeper commitment or

they may conclude their choice is not consistent with The Dream and make a career change (Levenson, et al, 1976).

Following either of these alternatives, the individual begins the next stage in which there is a period of stability. At this point the individual believes The Dream can be accomplished, that it will bring happiness, and it is earnestly and urgently pursued (Hill and Miller, 1981). Family size is most likely to be at a maximum at this time, leading to increased financial demands and to decreased satisfaction with pay and promotions (Entrekin and Everett, 1981). However, satisfaction with work in general, with supervision, and with co-workers is still high (Muchinsky, 1978). The latter portion of this relatively stable period, sometimes labeled Becoming One's Own Man (BOOM) is characterized by increased independence, increased need to succeed, and an extreme amount of energy invested in one's career.

The fact that one must decide at some point whether or not they have or will attain their goals leads to the next significant stage in the progression of adult development, the mid-life or mid-career transition. The mid-life transition is a major review of one's life and career status. This is when one takes stock, when one compares reality with The Dream. The message implicitly and explicitly expressed throughout the literature is that this is a very difficult period that most people will experience.

Even if major successes necessary to achieving The Dream have been attained, the mid-life crisis may occur. The issue is not whether goals are achieved, but rather the existence of disparity between what one has gained in an inner sense and what one wants for him or her self. During this time career aspirations may need to be adjusted downward or changed (Farrell and Rosenberg, 1981).

The final phase of life stage and career development described by most researchers involves the acceptance of the reality of the work place. The Dream, in its initial form, will not be fulfilled. Movement into this new period of stability is typically described as a positive experience. One becomes more family oriented rather than career oriented; external organizational criteria for success are eschewed for personal internal standards (Medlay, 1980).

Over the course of an individual's progression through these developmental stages, one would expect to find a variety of variables which would be affected by such changes. Of importance to this paper are studies designed to test the existence of the mid-life crisis and the transition from this crisis to the stage of acceptance.

In general, the weight of the evidence using career change as the dependent variable supports the presence of a mid-life transition. As opposed to career change research, however, most research using job satisfaction measures has not supported the existence of any mid-life crisis or

transition.

In reviewing the evidence regarding movement from the mid-career crisis stage to the stage of acceptance and resolution, once again, the evidence is mixed. Some researchers report increases in job satisfaction (Harrocks and Mussman, 1978), while others indicate reductions in happiness and job satisfaction (Muchinsky, 1978). Existing evidence seems to support some type of change during this time of life; however, the exact nature of this change is unclear.

In reviewing the existing literature on adult life and career stage development several potential problems and weaknesses become apparent, which may help to explain the confusing state of affairs. Many authors use differing language to describe presumably the same behaviors. Much of the research breaks the different career stages into age categories, unfortunately, different authors use different age categories to represent the various stages. At times, the same observed behaviors are used to reach different conclusions. There are also problems with the basic research methodologies which have been utilized. For example, research using the self-report tends to produce different results from research using in-depth interviews; interviews lead to a negative presentation of one's work role while surveys indicate job satisfaction. Questionnaires tend to make respondents defensive (Arvey and

Gross, 1977). Other limitations include restricted age range samples and ambiguous occupational classifications.

If these observations are true then it can be concluded that much methodologically sound research concerning the existence of career stages must occur before a general theory can begin to take shape. It is the purpose of this investigation to contribute to this base of research. The present study proposes to utilize measures of motivational styles which should follow specific patterns if adult life stage theory, as previously outlined, is correct. The motivational styles of need for achievemen. (nAch), need for power (nPow), and need for affiliation (nAff), as described by McClelland (1965) should be especially sensitive indicators of changes in individuals as they progress through the career stages as predicted by adult life stage theorists.

If adult stage theory is correct, one would expect specific motivational styles to be in effect at different times throughout one's career. This would be particularly true as a person moves through the mid-life crisis and into the last stable period preceding retirement. Because both nAch and nPow are motivations associated with succeeding in a career, adult stage theory would predict a gradual increase in nAch or nPow from the time one enters the second career stage, during which a commitment is made to a particular career position, until the period of time

immediately preceding the mid-life crisis, the BOOM period. During the BOOM period, nAch and nPow should become increasingly strong as one directs an increasing amount of energy toward achieving the key event in one's career goals which will signal occupational success. The commitment to achieving this goal should be reflected by an increased value being placed on work related activities. This period should also reflect a reduction in the behaviors associated with nAff such as the development of social relations.

During the mid-life crisis and after, motivational patterns should begin to change as one begins to give up the career goals associated with The Dream. After the individual has adjusted to the fact that they have progressed as far up the career ladder as they will go, adult stage theory states that they will become more oriented toward family, friendship, and social types of relationships. If this is true, then there should be an increase in affiliation needs and a concomitant decrease in achievement and power needs after the mid-life crisis has been resolved.

To summarize, the present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Are the motivational styles of nAch, nPow, and nAff reflected by the existence of discrete groups whose motivational patterns are dominated by those needs?

2. If discrete groups representing these different motivational styles exist, are there significant differences among these groups in terms of (a) age, (b) number of years in their current occupational position, and (c) number of dependent children?

3. If discrete groups representing these different motivational styles exist, does membership vary according to an expressed proclivity for the following activities: (a) activities with friends, (b) public and service related activities, (c) familily related activities, (d) work related activities, and (e) time spent in solitary activities?

4. Is there a curvilinear relationship between motivational style and age, number of years in current occupational position and number of dependents?

Method

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 119 public school employees. The subjects were all volunteers and represented the full range of occupational positions filled by certified employees of the school districts. The sample included employees involved with grades K through 12.

Procedure

Motivational style was measured by administering the Job Choice Decision-Making Exercise (JCE) designed by Stahl and Harrell (1982). The JCE is an objectively scored, paper and

pencil measure of nAch, nPow, and nAff.

To determine if groups of subjects, each dominated by the same motivational need, could be formed, a disjoint clustering procedure was used (SAS Institute, 1982).

In addition to the JCE, each subject was asked to provide the previously mentioned demographic data about themselves, and to rank order the previously mentioned activities in terms of their ability to produce satisfaction in them. This information was solicited to determine if there were any differences among the subjects falling in the various clusters or groups.

Results

The first research question involved establishing the optimum number of groups of subjects with the same motivational patterns. The cluster analysis revealed the optimal number of groups was three. In each of the three groups, the mean score of a different motivational style was highest. This indicates that each group was dominated by one motivational style, and this need was different for each group.

The second research question sought to determine if there were any significant differences among the groups in terms of their ages, the number of years in their current occupation, and the number of dependent children. The results of a MANOVA indicated there were no overall differences. Follow up univariate F tests also indicated no

differences.

The third research question addressed the relative importance to the subjects of the specific activities associated with the different motivational styles. Chi square analyses failed to reveal any differences among groups or clusters in terms of which activities produced the greatest amount of satisfaction.

Finally, since adult developmental theory would predict a curvilinear relationship between motivational style and age, number of years in current occupation, and number of dependent children, a series of multiple regressions were conducted, looking for a quadratic relationship. No significant relationships were indicated.

Discussion

Although the results of this study clearly support McClelland's theory that the needs for achievement, power, and affiliation are dominant factors in human motivation, the results regarding the demographic variables and prioritization of activities indicates that none of the groups were different on any of these measures. If adult life stage theory is correct, both in terms of general adult development and career development, one would expect significant differences to exist in the characteristics and responses measured by these variables. These results do not support the existence of discrete stages in adult life or career stages.

Furthermore, adult developmental theory would predict a curvilinear relationship between the intensity of the motivational styles and the demographic variables of age, number of years in current occupational position, and number of dependent children. Specifically, as age increases the motivational needs of nAch or nPow should also increase until the last career stage, at which time the intensity of both of these motivations should reduce. This relationship is predicted because during all of the stages described by adult life stage theory prior to the mid-career crisis, the major goal is succeeding at one's occupation. According to McClelland's theory, both nAch and nPow are associated with achieving success. Concomitantly, the need for affiliation should be low in intensity until after the mid-career crisis is resolved, at which time nAff should increase. This effect is predicted because it is during the post mid-career crisis time period that one's orientation changes from career to family and interpersonal relationships. This response is clearly consistent with McClelland's concept of need for affiliation. Adult life stage theory clearly predicts these changes in motivations as one ages.

Another of the predicted effects of the mid-career crisis is the realignment of one's values regarding occupational position such that one either accepts the limitations imposed on one's career progress or changes occupations. Therefore, the number of years spent in one's

current occupation should increase until the change in motivational styles associated with the mid-life crisis. Then, as nAch or nPow decrease and nAff increase and individuals choose the option of changing jobs, the number of years in current occupation should decrease.

The same type of relationship should also be true, albeit less clearly, between these motivational needs and one's number of dependent children. As the responsibilities associated with raising a family, financial and emotional, decrease, one is less motivated to succeed at work and more motivated to establish new and different relationships with family and friends.

The lack of curvilinear relationships between the demographic variables of age, number of years in current occupation and number of dependent children, and motivational styles suggests that there are no consistent patterns of development throughout adulthood, as measured by these variables. Therefore, the results of this study do not support the existence of discrete adult or career stages.

In interpreting these results one should keep in mind that the population sampled in this study was limited to individuals in the field of education. It is possible that a sample including a wider range of professions would reveal the predicted relationships between the variables and motivational styles examined.

The existence of or lack of existence of discrete life or career stages has important ramifications, both in terms of adult developmental theory and practical applications such as career counseling and organizational decision making. As in any study involving construct validation, the need for continued research in the area of adult development is clearly indicated.

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